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PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO RUEHNAG RUEHNH  
DE RUEHKO #0929/01 0950754  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 040754Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3166  
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY  
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J5//  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHHMHBA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI  
RHMFIUU/HQ PACAF HICKAM AFB HI//CC/PA//  
RHMFIUU/USFJ //J5/JO21//  
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RUAYJAA/CTF 72  
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8665  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 9198

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 TOKYO 000929

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DEPT FOR E, P, EB, EAP/J, EAP/P, EAP/PD, PA;  
WHITE HOUSE/NSC/NEC; JUSTICE FOR STU CHEMTOB IN ANTI-TRUST DIVISION;  
TREASURY/OASIA/IMI/JAPAN; DEPT PASS USTR/PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE;  
SECDEF FOR JCS-J-5/JAPAN,  
DASD/ISA/EAPR/JAPAN; DEPT PASS ELECTRONICALLY TO USDA  
FAS/ITP FOR SCHROETER; PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR;  
CINCPAC FLT/PA/ COMNAVFORJAPAN/PA.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 04/04/08

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DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS  
April 4, 2008

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ARTICLES:

(1) Information on U.S. deserters not provided; Calls growing for sharing information

A U.S. service member has been arrested in connection with yet another heinous crime. The suspect is a sailor who fled from a base. There are growing calls for tighter U.S. military surveillance of service members of loose morals, as well as for information on deserters.

On April 3, U.S. Ambassador to Japan J. Thomas Schieffer called on Mayor Ryoichi Kabaya of Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture, to offer an apology. A stern-faced Kabaya told a press conference after his meeting with Ambassador Schieffer and others: "We asked the U.S. military to take specific measures, such as a system that will not produce deserters and a solid communication system with our city."

The arrested was Olatunbosun Ugbogu, a 22-year-old seaman apprentice (itto suihei) of Nigerian nationality. He deserted from Yokosuka Naval Base on March 8 after causing trouble there. The U.S. military declared him a deserter on March 10.

The U.S. Navy did not ask the Japanese side for investigative cooperation until the murder occurred on March 19. The city received information (on Ugbogu) for the first time on March 20. A political assistant at U.S. Navy command in Japan said on the phone, "There is a possibility that a deserter is involved in the murder."

The Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement provides that (the U.S. military) is allowed to request Japanese investigative authorities to arrest deserters. According to the National Police Agency, U.S. Forces Japan made such requests a total of nine times between 2005 and March 31, 2008. Of them, two deserters have not been apprehended. The U.S. Navy command has not made public the number of

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deserters, while indicating it "cannot comment" on what situations the U.S. military asks for cooperation.

In Yokosuka, an aircraft carrier crew member committed a murder in January 2006. In July 2007, a sailor also stabbed two young women in the city. There is growing outrage in the city, with one citizen saying, "What has the U.S. military been doing over the last two years?"

In Okinawa, a U.S. Marine allegedly assaulted a middle school girl in February this year. This was followed by a string of incidents by persons connected with the U.S. military, such as drunk driving and trespassing. Governor Hirokazu Nakaima said critically, "The U.S. military has not strictly enforced discipline."

Tetsuei Tamayose, 73, the chairman of the Prefectural Liaison Council for Nurturing Children who also served as chief organizer of a prefectural protest rally against incidents and accidents by U.S. service members, held in March this year, said: "The seaman's involvement had been suspected all along since the incident occurred. Japanese police have not been able to interview (the seaman), and that I feel is a barrier of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement."

Yokosuka City Base Affairs Division Chief Masashi Suzuki noted, "We have never heard of a crime committed by a deserter. Information must be shared in one way or another." But when it comes to specific measures, he said, "It is a matter for the U.S. military to consider." The U.S. Navy headquarters in Japan also said: "There is only one way not to produce deserters: lock up the service members in their bases."

Government concerned about possible ill effects on Japan-U.S. relations

The government is concerned that a string of crimes committed by service members based in Japan might adversely affect Japan-U.S. relations.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura yesterday afternoon called U.S. Ambassador to Japan J. Thomas Schieffer to his ministry and

protested, saying, "It is truly regrettable that another murder has been committed by a U.S. service member." The Ambassador apologized, saying: "It was truly a tragic incident and one that we could not have prevented. We are deeply sorry." (Editor's note: The note taker indicates that the Ambassador did not specifically say that the incident was one that we could not have prevented.)

The government is also intensely concerned about the fact the incident occurred in Yokosuka, which "has a deep understanding of U.S. forces in Japan," a Foreign Ministry source put it. The U.S. military is scheduled to deploy a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier -- the first in Japan -- at Yokosuka Naval Base in August this year. The Yokosuka mayor accepted its deployment after fierce debate.

Foreign Minister Machimura applied pressure on Ambassador Schieffer, saying, "(The incident) will impair the mayor's position. Caution must be practiced."

The government was especially shocked by the fact that the crime was committed by a deserter. Under the SOFA, U.S. service members are allowed to enter Japan without passports. The governments of Japan

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and the United States have reached an agreement to consider how information on deserters and other matters should be provided. It will be discussed soon by the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee.

Meanwhile, the secretaries general of three opposition parties, including the Democratic Party of Japan, presented yesterday a SOFA revision plan to Foreign Minister Koumura and others. The plan is designed to (1) apply the alien registration system to U.S. service members living off base, and (2) expand the scope of pre-indictment handover to include all crimes.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda asked reporters at his official residence yesterday, "If the SOFA is revised, will such an incident not occur?"

(2) Editorial - Arrest of U.S. seaman: Information about deserter should have been available to Japanese side

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)  
April 4, 2008

U.S. Ambassador to Japan J. Thomas Schieffer apologized: "I deeply regret this incident and apologize for it." But this apology had a hollow ring amid a succession of crimes committed by U.S. military personnel.

A half month has passed since a taxi driver was killed on the job in a residential area in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. A U.S. serviceman of Nigerian nationality was handed over to Kanagawa prefectural police from the U.S. Yokosuka Naval Base and was arrested on suspicion of robbery and murder.

The taxi driver was attacked and stabbed to death by a passenger he picked up. This was a terrible incident for other taxi drivers, as well.

Yokosuka City also had an incident two years ago, in which a U.S. serviceman robbed a woman and killed her. This past February, a U.S. Marine was arrested on a charge of raping a junior high school girl in Okinawa, but this case was dropped, as the victim withdrew her complaint.

Measures have been taken to prevent a recurrence, but a heinous crime has again taken place.

What has surfaced in the ongoing police investigation is one important factor, which is the fact that the arrested U.S. seaman deserted more than 10 days before committing the crime, and that the U.S. military were searching for his whereabouts. But the information about the existence of such a deserter was not known to local governments until the incident occurred.

The Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) does not obligate

the U.S. to inform Japan of missing U.S. military personnel. Reportedly, the seaman who killed the taxi driver caused trouble in the base and disappeared. Presumably, he might have fled without much money on him. Given this, it was fully conceivable that he could cause trouble outside the base.

If the Japanese side had been told about the deserter, the police would have more frequently patrolled the vicinity of the base and could have found the deserter before he committed a murder. Taxi

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drivers also would have been wary of any foreigner they picked up, suspecting he might have deserted from the military.

If there are U.S. servicemen who may commit a crime, we ask the U.S. military to let the Japanese side know that fact.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military have been cooperative toward the Japanese police investigation this time. The U.S. military, which had taken the deserter into custody, has conveyed to prefectural police every detail of its interrogations. With the planned deployment of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier at Yokosuka in August, the U.S. forces wanted to avoid incurring any negative reaction from the local community.

Under SOFA, however, if the U.S. military take a serviceman into custody, the U.S. side will not hand him over to the Japanese side before indictment. We wonder, however, whether SOFA should be kept as it is. In this case, the U.S. side handed the seaman to the Japanese side before indictment. This treatment has been taken as "favorable consideration" by the U.S. to Japan.

In order to prevent and settle incidents, how will Japan and the U.S. share information and work together? We think it is high time to reconsider SOFA and the way it is implemented.

There have been 7 cases heinous crimes committed by U.S. servicemen in Japan during the past year involving 10 persons. If the number of crimes is not reduced, local communities housing U.S. military bases will only become more fearful. Mutual trust, the foundation of Japan-U.S. relations, could then waver.

We again ask the U.S. military to devise measures to prevent heinous crimes.

(3) Editorial: U.S. sailor's arrest-SOFA's flexible implementation needed

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
April 4, 2008

There have been heinous crimes involving U.S. military personnel. The anxiety and anger of local communities hosting U.S. military bases is growing.

In February this year, a U.S. Marine was arrested for (allegedly) raping a junior high school girl in the Okinawa prefectural town of Chatan. In the wake of that incident, U.S. Forces Japan pledged to prevent similar incidents from recurring. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Schieffer also expressed his regret and offered apologies. We ask USFJ to educate and guide its personnel in a thoroughgoing way.

A taxi driver of Tokyo's Shinagawa Ward was recently stabbed to death in his taxi on a street near the U.S. Yokosuka Naval Base in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. In this incident, a U.S. Navy seaman apprentice of Nigerian nationality, who was in the U.S. Navy's custody at the U.S. naval base, is strongly suspected of having committed the crime. Kanagawa prefectural police have now arrested this U.S. sailor on the charges of robbery and murder.

Kanagawa prefectural police obtained an arrest warrant for the U.S. sailor on suspicion of murdering the taxi driver. Local investigative authorities asked the U.S. Navy to turn over the

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sailor before his indictment, based on an intergovernmental agreement on the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement's improved implementation, and they executed the arrest warrant upon the sailor's transfer to local police.

The arrested U.S. serviceman has basically admitted to the allegations, and Kanagawa police are now investigating him to pursue what happened and why he killed the taxi driver.

The SOFA, concluded between Japan and the United States in 1960, provides that the United States will detain suspects in its custody until Japanese investigative authorities indict them.

As it stands, if U.S. military personnel commit a crime in Japan and run into a U.S. military base, Japanese police cannot do anything until they are indicted.

Admitting that this is too unfair and will only worsen Japanese sentiment toward U.S. forces, the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee agreed in 1995 to improve the SOFA's implementation. Based on this bilateral agreement, the United States is to favorably consider Japanese requests for turning over U.S. military personnel involved in heinous crimes. In other criminal cases involving SOFA-status personnel as well, the United States is also to consider Japanese requests if Japan has serious concern about the cases. The agreement, though equivocal, improved the SOFA's implementation.

In the incident this time, a Yokosuka-based U.S. serviceman came up as a material witness from the start. The U.S. Navy, which investigated him on a charge of desertion, has remained committed to fully cooperating in the Japanese police's investigation. The suspect was smoothly handed over to local police through the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee's procedures.

There is no end to crimes involving U.S. military personnel in Okinawa and other prefectures hosting U.S. military bases. On this occasion, the U.S. military should take every possible measure in enforcing discipline for its personnel and should also take even more flexible and elastic actions for the SOFA's implementation in order to earn Japan's confidence.

(4) Masanori Yamazaki, whose wife was killed by U.S. serviceman in 2006: U.S. military has changed nothing; Day of reflection, curfew empty measures

ASAHI (Page 31) (Full)  
April 3, 2008

The Kanagawa Prefectural Police have decided to seek an arrest warrant for a Yokosuka-based U.S. Navy seaman on suspicion of killing a tax driver. In this regard, Masanori Yamazaki, 60, whose wife was killed by a U.S. military serviceman in January 2006 in Kanagawa Prefecture, angrily said: "The U.S. military has not changed anything. I feel frustrated. The incident has made my blood boil."

A crewmember of the USS Kitty Hawk attempted to rob Yamazaki's 56-year-old wife in the early morning of Jan. 3, 2006, on her way to work. His wife resisted and was murdered after being beaten and stomped by the Kitty Hawk sailor. The sailor stole 16,000 yen in cash and fled. Four days after that, the sailor was arrested on suspicion of a robbery and murder. In June 2006, the Yokohama

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District Court sentenced him to an indefinite prison term.

The U.S. serviceman offered no apology during the trial. In October 2006, Yamazaki filed suit against the United States and the sailor for about 200 million yen. He claimed that the sailor's superior had not taken any such measures as forbidding him from drinking, although he had gone bar-hopping before he killed the woman.

The special civil law on the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) stipulates that if a U.S. service member illegally inflicts damage on other people while on duty in Japan, the Japanese

government will pay the damages. Although the sailor committed the crime off duty, Yamazaki has pursued the responsibility of the U.S. military, claiming that the U.S. military has supervisory responsibility. Yamazaki also has asserted that the nation does not take measures for crimes committed by U.S. military personnel.

Besides the lawsuit, Yamazaki had called for eradicating crimes by U.S. military personnel by participating in protest rallies. In a rally in mid-February in Tokyo protesting sexual assaults against schoolgirls in Okinawa by U.S. servicemen, Yamazaki before about 80 participants stressed:

"I believed that the U.S. military is deployed to protect Japan, but my wife was brutally killed. I cannot suffer in silence. I want to make efforts until there are no crimes (committed by U.S. service members)."

Under such circumstances, the tragic taxi driver murder occurred just two years after Yamazaki's wife had been slain.

Yamasaki said:

"It was wrong that the U.S. side did not report anything to the Japanese government at the time the suspect deserted. Even though the U.S. military set aside a day for reflection and imposed a temporary ban on leaving the base, they were empty measures. If eliminating the U.S. bases in Japan is difficult, I want at least U.S. service members to stay on the bases."

SCHIEFFER